

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT RECORD

NUMBER: CO-GJFO-02-08-EA

CASEFILE/PROJECT NUMBER: N/A

PROJECT NAME: NORTH FRUITA DESERT MANAGEMENT PLAN

ECOREGION/PLANNING UNIT: Grand Valley Intensive Recreation Management Area

LEGAL DESCRIPTION: Bounded by East Salt Creek on the West, Coal Gulch on the North, 21 Road on the east, and the BLM/private land boundary on the south.

APPLICANT: Bureau of Land Management (BLM)

BACKGROUND:

The North Fruita Desert Area (Grand Valley) was identified as an Intensive Recreation Management Area (IRMA) in the Grand Junction Field Office, Resource Management Plan (RMP) in 1987. The RMP recommended additional planning in the area because of issues such as public use supervision and resource protection. The area's close proximity to Grand Junction and Fruita has also made it increasingly valuable for dispersed recreational opportunities. The area is commonly used by residents of Mesa County but is experiencing increased use from throughout both the region and out-of-state residents, as the mountain bike and off-highway vehicle (OHV) opportunities become more widely known.

Recreational opportunities present in the area include OHV use, mountain biking, horseback riding, camping, hiking, hunting, shooting, driving for pleasure, and viewing scenery and natural features. Existing levels of undirected recreational use have resulted in impacts such as expanding primitive camping areas, parking in new and inappropriate locations, driving cross-country, littering, conflicts between recreational groups and with other land uses, and visitor safety issues. Existing land uses in the area include natural gas development and extraction, grazing, water control management by the Bureau of Reclamation (BOR), wildlife use, and development of enclosed private land parcels.

Representatives from various user groups and concerned parties with an interest in and knowledge about the area formed as a sanctioned subcommittee of the Resource Advisory Council (RAC), the North Fruita Desert (NFD) Citizen Ad-Hoc Committee in August 2000 in order to determine the appropriate management direction for the North Fruita Desert planning area. This group consisted of representatives from the Colorado Environmental Coalition, Sierra Club, Colorado Plateau Mountain Bike Association, Mesa County Cycling Association, Grand Valley Mountain Bike Patrol, Grand Valley Jeep Club, Motorcycle Trail Riding Association, Bookcliff Rattlers Motorcycle Club, Western Slope ATV Association, city of Fruita, Colorado State Parks, landowners, grazing permittees, other users such as horseback riders and shooters,

and representatives from the BLM's Northwest RAC. Fourteen meetings were held between August 2000 and December 2002. The BLM coordinated with the North Fruita Desert Citizens Ad-Hoc Committee during this time to write a management plan for the area. The management plan contains a vision for the area, goals and objectives, and management recommendations and actions for the area. The recommended management actions in this plan were formulated to direct public use to appropriate areas, define emphasized use areas for specific recreational uses, decrease user conflicts, and decrease the impact of recreation users on the landscape. The North Fruita Desert Management Plan contains the management goals, objectives and management direction, and actions agreed upon by the BLM and the NFD Citizens Ad-Hoc Committee.

NEED FOR PROPOSED ACTION:

One of the outcomes of the 1987 RMP was a recommendation for additional planning for the North Fruita Desert. This management plan fulfills the obligation of the GJFO to complete a site-specific plan for this area. It establishes management objectives and identifies management strategies to achieve those objectives. The North Fruita Desert Management Plan is consistent with the RMP and BLM management policies, and is an integrated issue-driven plan that addresses all major resource disciplines present in the area and the issues associated with them.

The western slope of Colorado has experienced a large increase in growth in recent years. As the population has increased, the demand placed on nearby public lands has increased as well. The area included in this plan is in close proximity to the cities of Fruita and Grand Junction and is easily accessed by all types of recreation users.

During the past few years the BLM has been made aware of problems with conflicting uses within this area and an increase in damage to the natural resources because of increased use. The BLM's 1987 Resource Management Plan allows for motorized use on "existing" roads and trails. Since 1987, the area has experienced a dramatic increase in motorized and non-motorized use, particularly from mountain bikes that were not recognized in the 1987 RMP. A system of user-built trails (developed without BLM authorization), promotion of the area's bicycling resources, and development of a regional-level mountain bike festival have cemented the area's reputation as a premier mountain bike destination. The management actions outlined in the North Fruita Desert Management Plan are intended to allow traditional uses to continue such as grazing, and oil and gas development, as well as to prevent additional resource degradation and minimize user conflicts while allowing for both present and future recreational uses.

PLAN CONFORMANCE REVIEW:

Name of Plan: Grand Junction Resource Management Plan (RMP)

Date Approved: January 29, 1987

Page or Decision Number: Area F, p. 2-46

Summarized below is the management direction for each resource as noted in the 1987 RMP (Recreation through Fire). How management for those resources would be changed is discussed in the section entitled “RMP Amendment.” The proposed actions have been reviewed for conformance with this plan (43 CFR 1610.5, BLM 1617.3). The RMP placed the North Fruita Desert Area in an “Emphasis on Water” category.

Recreation

Manage the Grand Valley (which includes the Grand Valley desert and Rabbit Valley) as an intensive use recreation management area. Identify the three OHV open areas (one of which is within the North Fruita Desert Plan Area) for intensive public and competitive OHV use. Identify these same areas as a no shooting zone. Use signs and public information materials to reduce user conflicts and unauthorized activities. Focus management on providing “rural” Recreation Opportunity Spectrum (ROS) opportunities in the OHV open area and “roaded natural” ROS opportunities in the remainder of the desert area. Address the need for active supervision of recreational uses in the management plan for the Grand Valley Intensive Recreation Management Area (which the North Fruita Desert Plan partially addresses).

Off Road Vehicles

Designate areas as open to cross-country vehicle use and competitive events: includes a 400-acre area on the east side of 18 Road immediately north of where 18 Road crosses the Highline Canal. Consider competitive events proposed outside the established open area on an individual basis. The intent of permit processing would be to keep most of an event on existing roads and trails (most washes are existing trails) and allow up to 25 percent of the total race mileage cross country (off existing roads and trails). The rugged, relatively barren zones of exposed Mancos Shale that are scattered throughout the Grand Valley desert are the areas where cross-country use might be authorized. Monitor competitive events to ensure compliance with permit requirements and to prevent excessive cross-country use from damaging soil structure in any one area. Do not allow competitive use to occur repeatedly in any one area outside of established open areas. Limit vehicle use in the remainder of the area to existing roads primarily to protect watershed values.

Water

Take measures to reduce sediment yield from approximately 117,000 acres and salinity yield from approximately 133,000 acres in the Grand Valley desert. Treat severely eroding stream channels in Big Salt Wash (8.3 miles) and East Salt Creek (15.4 miles).

Locatable Minerals

The entire area is open to mineral location except for those areas closed because of existing withdrawals.

Coal

That portion of the planning area within the Bookcliffs (Coal Gulch area) contains mineable coal and is available for leasing and construction of surface facilities.

Oil and Gas

Make available for leasing approximately 56,263 acres with standard lease terms, 25,400 acres with no surface occupancy, and 108,620 acres with other stipulations to protect scenic and natural values (including the face of the Bookcliffs, steep slopes, deer and elk winter range and threatened and endangered species).

Wildlife

Prohibit wood sales in nonproductive woodlands in the Grand Valley between the Bookcliffs and the Colorado River. Prohibit disturbing activities in deer and elk critical winter ranges and migration corridors from December 1 to May 1. Retain 30 percent of sagebrush manipulation areas in leave strips or untreated patches. Prohibit surface disturbance within 100 feet of perennial streams, except at necessary creek crossings.

Threatened and Endangered Species

Protect known important habitat sites of sensitive animal and plant species and communities from surface disturbing activities.

Livestock Grazing

Initiate intensive grazing systems on all allotments in the Grand Valley desert. This would entail additional range projects and some changes in grazing use to ensure ground cover, to minimize soil loss, and to manage for sod forming species where appropriate. Give special attention to the ecological integrity of riparian areas in the implementation of livestock grazing management plans.

Public Utilities

Identify threatened and endangered species habitat, scenic values, steep slopes, deer and elk winter range, and known locations of sensitive species as sensitive to the location of public utilities. Identify the remainder of the area as suitable.

Transportation

Close roads that no longer serve their primary purpose and that have relatively little value to multiple-use management to protect wildlife. The highest priority for closure would be roads in critical areas having a good chance for success in closure.

Fire

Manage portions of this emphasis area to protect adjacent private property through the prevention of fire spread from public land, protect oil and gas facilities, pumping stations, other improvements, coal outcrops, perennial forage resources, riparian areas and reduce air quality impacts.

RMP AMENDMENT

This plan serves as an RMP amendment in that some elements of the plan go beyond the existing RMP direction detailed above. These changes from the RMP are as follows:

- 1) Bicycle and hiker emphasis areas would be designated;
- 2) Both motorized and non-motorized routes would be designated.
- 3) New motorized and non-motorized routes would be constructed.
- 4) An RMP provision permitting race course designers to plan events with 25 percent of the total mileage off the existing trail grid to be disallowed.
- 5) The proposed campground and existing trailhead area would be protected from future coal and oil and gas operations by a No Surface Occupancy (NSO) lease stipulation. The following are the legal descriptions of the NSO. Campground 200 acres: Lot 9, SW $\frac{1}{4}$ NE $\frac{1}{4}$, N $\frac{1}{2}$ SE $\frac{1}{4}$, SW $\frac{1}{4}$ SE $\frac{1}{4}$, Section 30, T. 8 S., R. 101 W., Trailhead 80 acres: Lot 11, Section 31, T. 8 S., R. 101 W. and Lot 2, Section 6, T. 9 S., R. 101 W., all within the 6th P.M. However, if coal surface facilities were to impact the campground and trailhead, a special stipulation on the coal lease, right-of-way, or other authorization would require the coal company to replace the facilities by funding the relocation of the campground and trailhead. If the coal mine surface facilities are proposed within the campground and/or trailhead area designated as NSO, the NSO requirement may be waived or reduced in scope if the coal company pays for the relocation of the campground and trailhead, as noted above, or if the lessee can demonstrate that operations can be conducted without causing unacceptable impacts.
- 6) Camping would be prohibited in the bicycle emphasis area except for designated campsites.
- 7) No solid fuel fires would be allowed in the bicycle emphasis area.
- 8) No target shooting would be allowed in the bicycle emphasis area.

DESCRIPTION OF ALTERNATIVES:

1. No Action
2. Friends of the North Fruita Desert
3. Environmental Focus
4. Multiple Use, with three sub-alternatives

NO ACTION ALTERNATIVE:

This alternative involves the continuation of existing management direction and policies pertaining to travel management and recreational use of the North Fruita Desert planning area. Specifically, motorized use would continue to be allowed on all existing roads and trails. Popular routes would be identified using maps and signs. Some additional conveniences (sanitation, signing, trailheads) could be developed. No camping facilities would be included nor

would any additional restrictions be placed on recreational visitors. Alterations or additions to the trail system could be made within the BLM process.

FRIENDS OF THE NORTH FRUITA DESERT ALTERNATIVE

The priority of this alternative is on the preservation of single-track trail and on maximizing private land access opportunities. The alternative includes a designated bicycle use emphasis area and construction of new single-track trails to separate motorcycle and bicycle use on parallel trail systems.

1. Designate a mountain bicycle emphasis area at the base of the Bookcliffs that would emphasize mechanized, non-motorized recreation. Existing trails utilized by both bicyclists and motorcyclists would continue to see that use until parallel trails or reroutes could be constructed to separate those activities. User-requested additional trails would be considered by the BLM subject to the Agency's environmental analysis process.
2. Trails accessing and crossing private property in the western half of the study area would remain open pending a study focused on ways to continue that access, e.g., re-routing trails outside of private land, land acquisition, and easements.
3. A new single-track trail would be constructed to link 18 and 21 Roads. Use would be shared between the motorcycle and bicycle communities.
4. In order to decrease potential human/cattle conflict, all dogs would be under their owner's voice control while on trails. From January 1 to May 15 unattended dogs would be leashed while at campground or trailheads to protect calving livestock.

ENVIRONMENTAL FOCUS ALTERNATIVE

The priorities for the Environmental Focus alternative include protection of riparian areas, closure and control of OHV open areas, designation of three designated shooting areas, closure of duplicate trails to lessen trail density for protection of wildlife habitat, and designation of a non-motorized, non-mechanized hiker/equestrian emphasis area. Specific actions under this alternative are detailed below:

1. All trails within 100 feet of the riparian zone on either side of East Salt Creek and Big Salt Wash would be closed.
2. Recreational trails would be designated as open or closed. Duplicate, parallel, loop, and stem trails would be closed in order to decrease road and trail density. Burrowing owl and associated prairie dog habitat are special concerns, which determine the need for this action.

3. Designate and manage three shooting areas for all firearms use in the North Fruita Desert. Locations would be as follows: a) Gravel pit north of Highline State Park, b) Two target areas adjacent to 21 Road. Three other areas identified by the shooting community would not be designated shooting areas because of conflicts with existing trail locations and/or adjacency with privately owned land.
4. Designate a hiker/equestrian emphasis area on the east edge of the study area. The eastern most trail of the two routes entering the emphasis area would be designated for all uses including mechanized and non-motorized. The western most trail has nearly disappeared from non-use and would be designated closed. User-requested hiker/equestrian trails would be considered in the future subject to BLM's environmental analysis process.
5. All OHV open areas would be closed.
6. In order to decrease potential human/cattle conflict, all dogs would be under their owner's voice control while on trails. From January 1 to May 15 unattended dogs would be leashed while at campground or trailheads to protect calving livestock.

MULTIPLE-USE ALTERNATIVE:

The Multiple-Use Alternative would allow for approximately 35 miles of trails with a mountain bike emphasis, would create a hiking emphasis area, would provide 14-17 ½ miles of new multiple-use routes (mileage depends on which sub-alternative is selected) that would make trail connections and add to the flexibility of the route design, and would provide 2 miles of new bicycle trails within the bicycle emphasis area. The proposed actions making up the Multiple-Use Alternative are detailed below:

Multiple-Use Alternative (Sub-Alternative A)

- A. Two different general travel management prescriptions are being considered for the planning area. The "Encourage, Prohibit, Allow" (EPA) prescription and the designated routes prescription, are described below:
 1. The North Fruita Desert Area would be managed using an EPA approach. Encouraged routes are existing trails that form loops and connections and offer attractive recreational trail opportunities. These would be marked on the ground and on handout maps to allow for easy visitor orientation. Allowed routes are secondary trails that would be marked on handout maps with less line weight and not marked on the ground. These routes are identified solely to facilitate navigation. It is anticipated that many of these routes would see less use and some would eventually disappear through time. Prohibited routes would be closed. Typically these routes enter private lands and public access would be discouraged through signing. Encouraged and Allowed routes outside the bicycle emphasis

area would be open to all types of vehicles, although single-track trails would be limited to vehicles less than 32 inches wide. At the end of five years, the North Fruita Desert Area would be re-evaluated to ascertain if there has been significant progress in decreasing visitation on “Allowed” routes.

2. The designated routes model would be used to manage all motorized and mechanized travel. If increases in use indicate through monitoring, designated routes may also be applied to equestrian and foot traffic as well. In this prescription all routes would be designated as available to, or restricted to, each means of travel. Colorado standard travel management signs would be used. Administrative access would be provided to commercial sites (gas wells, range improvements). Desirable loop trails would be prominently signed. Trails in the bicycle emphasis area would be restricted to non-motorized use only, except for administrative and emergency needs. Outside the bicycle emphasis area all trails would be open to all uses with the exception of single-track trails. Single tracks would be open to hikers, bicyclists, equestrians and motorcyclists only. Trails not part of the recreation trail system and having no commercial value would be closed. All closed routes would be signed closed and systematically rehabilitated as resources allow.

B. The following actions are common to both travel management prescription described above:

1. Roads and trails entering private land would be signed “End of Public Route, Entering Private Land.” Trail-end signs would be located on public land, far enough from public/private land boundaries to allow vehicles to turn around on public land.
2. New shared-use, single-track trail would be constructed in the following locations:
 - ½ mile of trail connecting Coal Gulch Road with 16 Road, to the north of private property.
 - 2 miles of trail following a wash that intersects V.70 Road and is parallel to the western edge of Coal Gulch Road.
 - 4 miles of trail on the ridgeline immediately to the south of Coal Gulch Road.
 - 3½ miles of trail following Coyote Wash and trail segments further to the east with the intent of connecting Highline Park to the North Fruita Desert trails and to relocate most OHV traffic away from the Bureau of Reclamation water control structures and the Highline canal.

- 2 miles of trail parallel to 18 road, located 1/8 mile east of the private inholdings, which diverts traffic away from private lands and Big Salt Wash:
3. New bicycle, single-track trail would be constructed in the following locations:
 - 1 mile of trail connecting between the eastern extension of Vegetarian Trail and the Edge Loop Trail at the base of the Bookcliffs.
 - 1 mile of trail to the east of Prime Cut Trail that would accommodate beginner-to-intermediate bicycle riders on a north/south route.
 4. The OHV play area just north of the canal on 18 Road would be developed to a) control the spread of the area, b) allow for trailhead facilities for the motorized visitors, and c) allow for proper use and Tread Lightly information to best inform users of expected behavior. Actions include the following:
 - Fencing the outer boundary of the open area.
 - Fencing approximately 2½ miles north along the east side of 18 Road.
 - Fencing approximately 1 mile along the north side of Q.50 Road.
 - Installation of a vault toilet.
 - Installation of a trailhead facility near the intersection of 18 Road and Q.50 Road with a kiosk to orient visitors, instill proper use ethics, and inform visitors.
 - All fencing would be designed to allow for the passage of antelope. Fencing would be three-wire with a smooth bottom wire. Wire spacing would be 18", 30", and 42" as measured from the ground.
 5. Sections of the southern half of Zippity Doo Dah bicycle trail, which represents a soil erosion and safety hazard, would be rerouted and/or reconstructed. Until this work is completed, the trail would remain open to bicycle use.
 6. The existing rope-assisted bicycle route down the pour-over in Lippan Wash is considered a liability and safety hazard. The rope would be removed and an existing stock trail bypassing the hazardous point would be upgraded and extended to allow for safe passage.
 7. Additional trails throughout the planning area would be considered by BLM subject to the Agency's environmental analysis process. All users; whether motorized, mechanized, horseback, or afoot; would be

encouraged to present trail proposals to the BLM for evaluation as future designated routes. After the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process is complete, user groups would be given the opportunity to construct and maintain new authorized trails.

8. All new, unauthorized routes would be closed with signs and physical blocking, and then rehabilitated.
 9. Existing routes, which are part of a recognized trail system, that do not meet BLM standards would remain open until suitable relocated/alternative routes are available. Routes would be evaluated and restoration/repair work done on a five-year rotating basis.
 10. All drainage washes, except for East Salt Creek and the portion of Big Salt Wash north of the last privately owned land on 16 Road, would be open to all travel modes and all users. Motorized and mechanized users would be restricted from in-stream use of East Salt Creek and the above-named portion of Big Salt Wash because of these streams' riparian characteristics. Crossing use would not be curtailed.
 11. An area immediately north of the Coal Gulch road offers the potential for future recreational trail opportunities. Any further planning in this area would require a separate evaluation, environmental assessment process, and public involvement.
 12. BLM would discuss with BOR on an annual basis issues surrounding recreation impacts on the Highline Canal. At that time actions would be considered to protect the canal and its infrastructure. Routing of recreational trails would be the major tool used to discourage vandalism. Other physical protection measures would be considered as problems are identified.
 13. Reroute travel ways that traverse prairie dog colonies where feasible
- C. During the course of discussion about the trails, no resolution was reached about Lippan Wash. One of the following three scenarios would be used to manage trails in Lippan Wash:
1. Bicycle and motorcycle use on existing trails within the bicycle emphasis area would be separated to the greatest extent possible. Motorcycle traffic heading east on Coal Gulch Road would be routed to the bottom of the Hunter Canyon drainage on existing oil and gas service roads and south on 21 Road or west on R. 20 Road, which connects to single track in returning to 18 Road. This would allow for linkage to existing motorcycle trails without impacting the core of the bicycle emphasis area.

2. Bicycle and motorcycle use on existing trails within the bicycle emphasis area would be separated as much as possible with one exception. Motorcycle traffic heading east on Coal Gulch Road would follow existing oil and gas service roads (T8S R100W sec. 30,31 and T9S R100W sec. 6 and T9S R101W sec.1) to the bicycle route into Lippan Wash. The bicycle trail would be re-worked so that the motorcycles would use the bottom of the wash to the degree possible, and a new trail winding in and out of the wash would be constructed for the bicyclists. At the eastern edge of the bicycle emphasis area the trails would split with the bicyclists routed up Edge Loop. One and one-half miles of new single track would be constructed for the motorcyclists to route them to the east-west trail in T9S R101W sec. 3,4,5,6,7,8,9.
 3. The third alternative would be similar to the Lippan Wash alternative with the exception that bicycles and motorcycles would not share the trail in T8S R100W sec. 36. A 1½ mile of single-track trail would be constructed parallel to the existing bicycle trail into Lippan Wash. The rest of the route would be the same as detailed above.
- D. A primitive campground, based on present use patterns at the end of 18 Road, would be constructed. This campground would be designed to accommodate 35 to 40 individual sites, clustered around vault-type toilets equipped with wooden screens encircling the toilet thrones. Sites would be hardened for use and the main campground loop road, as well as the individual site access spurs, would be delineated with barriers to prevent area spread. Three existing sites located near in the drainage bottom would be closed. Construction of the campground would necessitate the removal of 20 to 25 small juniper trees. No surface occupancy would be instituted to protect 200 acres and the recreational resources present in the area of the campground.

The following special stipulation would be applied to any coal lease, off-lease right-of-way, or other authorization that proposes coal surface facilities that might impact the campground and trailhead near the end of 18 Road:

If the BLM determines that the campground and trailhead would be impacted by the proposed coal mine surface facilities such that the campground and trailhead should be relocated, the coal lessee shall fund the cost of an environmental analysis to determine the best site for relocation and also the cost for relocating the campground and trailhead. If the coal mine surface facilities are proposed within the campground and/or trailhead area designated as No Surface Occupancy (NSO), the NSO requirement may be waived or reduced in scope if the coal company pays for the relocation of the campground and trailhead, as noted above, or if the lessee can demonstrate that operations can be conducted without causing unacceptable impacts on the concern(s) identified (also see trailhead NSO, item 14).

1. No open, solid fuels campfires would be allowed in the campground area (consistent with Stage I fire restrictions). Gasoline and gas cooking stoves would be acceptable.
 2. Overnight camping fees may be charged and all collected fees would be returned to the campground and used for maintenance and services. Partnership agreements to help the BLM in the management and collection of fees for the site would be sought.
 3. Camping outside the campground would generally be prohibited. During events that stretch the capacity of the campground to accommodate users, overflow camping would be planned for and the area rehabilitated after use.
- E. A hiker/equestrian emphasis area would be established. Hiking and horse use, as well as winter wildlife habitat, would be the priority in this area. Motorized use would be limited to one existing two-track trail entering the area (the other would be closed), except for administrative or emergency use.
- F. Commercial activities would continue to be subject to existing stipulations and regulations.
- G. Competitive and organized events would be considered through the BLM Special Recreation Permit process. Events that would adversely affect the existing trails or existing uses would not be permitted. A provision in the RMP allowing race events to plan 25 percent of total event mileage off the existing trail grid would no longer be allowed. In order to protect trails, stipulations governing competitive and event permits would include language allowing for the cancellation or alteration of routes in case of inclement weather. Monitoring both before and after events would be used to assess impacts attributable to the activity. Post-event rehabilitation and future permit stipulations would be based on monitored impacts. The BLM retains the discretion to limit the number of participants in any given permitted activity.

Except for observed trials motorcycle events, routes for these purposes would be limited to designated trails and washes.

Observed Trials is a competition among motorcyclists that scores them on the ability to traverse large rocks or other obstacles. Trials events would be carefully permitted to allow for the event to use suitably challenging terrain for sections and designated routes as transits between sections.

- H. Shooting areas would not be designated through this plan due to long-term lead hazard liability and garbage deposition issues. If a group of responsible users comes forward to partner with the BLM in maintaining recommended shooting sites in the North Fruita area, then BLM would reconsider this position. The

bicycle emphasis area would be closed to shooting, except for the lawful taking of game, due to public safety concerns and use conflicts.

- I. Public information and education kiosks would be installed at ten key locations. These kiosks would inform the public of recreational opportunities in the area, visitor use ethics, and travel and recreation restrictions. Handout maps explaining the trail management system and directing users would be available at all entry points.
- J. A lockable gate at the entrance to the county gravel site off Highway 139 would be installed to protect the ongoing rehabilitation of the site.
- K. An area immediately to the north of the Coal Gulch Road offers the potential for future shared use development. Any future development in this area would require a separate evaluation, environmental assessment process, and public involvement.
- L. In order to decrease potential human/cattle conflict, all dogs would be under their owner's voice control while on trails. From January 1 to May 15 unattended dogs would be leashed while at campground or trailheads to protect calving livestock.
- M. In order to protect the existing 18 Road trailhead, NSO is proposed for 80 acres surrounding the trailhead.

ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED BUT ELIMINATED

1. Annex Land North of Coal Gulch Road into the Plan

This alternative would add approximately 15,000 acres to the plan boundaries specifically aimed at providing single-track trail opportunities for the motorcycle community. A trailhead for motorized users would be constructed at the entrance to Coal Gulch. The addition of these future opportunities would preclude the need for shared routes for both bicycles and motorcycles on the margins of the bicycle emphasis area, which was a key element of the Multiple-Use Alternative. No actions implementing shared use of these trails would occur. This alternative is rejected for the following reasons:

This alternative would be dependent on future trail construction and until that construction was finished, the motorcycle community would not have access to any routes on the edge of the bicycle emphasis area traveling north/south or east/west.

The Grand Junction RMP provides for the protection of deer and elk critical winter range in this zone from December 1 to May 1. This alternative would not provide for the year round access to rolling terrain that motorcycle users presently enjoy because motorized users would be prohibited from accessing the area north of Coal Gulch Road for five months out of the year. This wildlife closure is reinforced by the generally wetter, colder

weather at this altitude, which effectively precludes winter-spring use of the area by, even beyond, the five-month wildlife closure.

Wildlife habitat considerations would preclude the construction of more than one loop route in this area. Motorcyclists would not have a significant opportunity with only one permissible route.

The trailhead location would not provide a practicable and feasible route up the cliffs to access the possible motorcycle routes on the plateau top north of Coal Gulch.

2. Construct an Additional Trail Down Layton Wash

This alternative puts forward a motorized trail down Layton Wash in order to avoid the need to share mechanized, non-motorized and motorized uses in Lippan Wash, which was a key element in the Multiple-Use Alternative. This alternative is rejected for the following reasons:

The route crosses privately owned land that would have to be acquired or an easement negotiated, or the private land would need to be bypassed; a difficult option within the tight confines of the canyon. There is an open mineshaft on the private land that would also have to be mitigated.

A year-round, naturally occurring spring used by wildlife is astride the route, which would be difficult to avoid within the tight canyon constraints. Wildlife would be disturbed by both construction and use of this trail on a continuing basis.

Soils are unstable, which adds to the difficulty of construction, maintenance, and use of the trail, and increases the potential cost of creating the trail. Construction of the trail, although possible in an engineering sense, would be prohibitively expensive.

**INSERTION TO ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS FORMAT FOR COMPLIANCE
WITH SECTION 302 OF THE FEDERAL LAND POLICY AND MANAGEMENT ACT
(FLPMA) RELATIVE TO THE COMB WASH GRAZING DECISION**

1. A review of applicable planning documents and a thoughtful consideration of new issues and new demands for the use of the public lands involved in the allotment has been made. This analysis concludes that the current land and resource uses are appropriate.
2. A review of applicable planning documents and a thoughtful consideration of new issues and new demands for the use of the public lands involved in the allotment has been made. This analysis concludes that the current land and resource uses are inappropriate because of the following factors/concerns and a land-use plan amendment would be completed prior to renewing this grazing authorization for more than one year:

Reasons for this conclusion are: _____

Standards for Public Land Health: A summary analysis of the Proposed Action on the Current Situation. Total Acres are determined by the document coordinator. If more than one allotment is being evaluated the document coordinator would identify them at this point. Allotment _____=a, _____=b.

	Acres Achieving or Moving Towards Achieving	Acres Not Achieving	Acres Not Applicable to Standard	Total Acres _____	Initials
Standard 1 (Upland soils: proper infiltration/permeability rates)					
Currently					
with Prop.					
Data & Conclusions:					
Standard 2 (Riparian systems functioning properly)					
Currently	X				LBR
with Prop.					
Data & Conclusions: Lower areas on Big Salt Wash were classified as not being riparian. The lower portion of East Salt Creek are functioning at risk in the PFC assessment and was determined to be outside the management control of the BLM due to irrigation withdrawals.					
Standard 3 (Healthy and productive plant/animal communities)					
Currently	85%plant				LBR
with Prop.					
Data & Conclusions: Plants: Most areas in the NFD are meeting land health standards. There are some areas of concern that are not meeting land health standards, these areas are normally located in the heavier Mancos shale valley bottoms, where wildland fire occurred, OHV travel has been heavy, or where historic grazing was concentrated (lambling areas, too many animals, grazing time and frequency during the growing season with out proper grazing management). Acres meeting, not meeting, or moving towards has not been determined and would be determined when a land health assessment has been completed for the area. An educated projection of currently meeting is within the proper box above.					
Standard 4 (Threatened and Endangered Species)					
Currently	X				RL DLS
with Prop.	X				
Data & Conclusions: See attached map showing known rare animals/plants/plant communities locations to be avoided. Overall it appears that the one species in the NFD listed for ESA protection, the bald eagle, should find conditions basically unaltered by the plan. Individuals of this species range throughout the plan area.					
Standard 5 (Water Quality)					
Currently			X		JS
with Prop.			X		
Data & Conclusions: Acres are not an appropriate measure of compliance with water quality standards. Refer to the water quality section below for an assessment of impacts.					
Summary					
Currently					
with Prop.					
Conclusions:					

AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT / ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS / MITIGATION MEASURES:

SETTING: A description of the setting and affected environment can be found on pages 4-10 in the proposed North Fruita Desert Management Plan.

CRITICAL ELEMENTS:

The following critical elements of the human environment have been analyzed under the Proposed Action and No-action alternatives. Other non-critical elements will be discussed in this document due to the nature and scope of the Proposed Action.

AIR QUALITY: There would be no major impacts to the Air Quality of the Grand Valley with this project.

Signature of specialist: /s/ David P. Stevens 6-25-02

CULTURAL RESOURCES: A records search of the planning unit was conducted by the GJFO archaeologist using in-house site data and the SHPO database. Twenty-six sites and 42 isolated finds have been recorded by various inventories. A field check of six sites recorded in the 1980s that had been classified as eligible for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) or “need data” was also conducted. It was determined that none of these sites is eligible under current standards. Re-evaluation forms were sent to the SHPO for concurrence. The extremely low density of prehistoric sites in the area is attributable to the arid nature of the local environment and a concomitant paucity of natural resources. Any new construction of roads, trails, or facilities would be preceded by a Class III inventory of the APE as required by Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA). The current project is in compliance with the NHPA, the Colorado State Protocol Agreement, and other federal law, regulation, policy, and guidelines regarding cultural resources.

Signature of specialist: /s/ Mike Berry 30 June 2003

ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE: There are no disproportionately high and/or adverse human health or environmental effects proposed with this project on minority populations and low-income populations.

Signature of specialist: /s/ David P. Stevens 6-25-02

FLOODPLAINS, WETLANDS, RIPARIAN ZONES, AND ALLUVIAL VALLEYS: The lower portions of Big Salt Creek were not classified as riparian in 1993. The lower portion of East Salt Creek was classified as riparian and functioning at risk. Reasons for function at risk were determined to be outside the BLM’s control and were partly due to irrigation withdraws on the private land upstream. No adverse affect on riparian resources is anticipated from implementation of any of the alternatives.

Signature of specialist: /s/ Lynae Rogers 7-21-03

INVASIVE, NONNATIVE SPECIES (Weeds): Part of the NFD area was intensively inventoried for noxious weeds in 2002, and the remaining area is designated for 2003. A few patches of

Russian knapweed are found in the desert country, and control of them is not seen as a problem. The most significant issue is diffuse knapweed, which occurs on Ross Ridge and is scattered along the two-track/bike trail that exits Ross Ridge into Lipan Wash. In 2002 the BLM weed crew made significant strides in eliminating this weed from the greater Garfield-Mesa Area. The BLM is confident that it is on the downhill side of this infestation, although follow-up would be necessary for several years until the seed bank is gone.

All Action Alternatives: History shows that disturbances; whether they are roads, trails, ponds, etc.; are the places that weeds get a toehold. Purely from a weed perspective, any action that results in the least disturbance is likely to minimize the threat of invasion. The good news about NFD is that the area is pretty harsh even for weeds to grow, and the ones that do not tend to spread at alarming rates. Given the fact that there is not a big weed problem to start with, any of the alternatives work (except No Action, see below). The proposed action is acceptable for weed management by the fact that the area would see intensive management. This would make weed management easier than haphazard use of an area. If the designated trail approach detailed in the Multiple-Use Alternative works well, the BLM can concentrate on areas of high use when looking for weeds, and we should see a decrease in routes that are avenues for weeds to start. If facilities are constructed, the equipment must be washed before it arrives on public land and contractors need to have that stipulation in the contract.

No Action: To continue custodial management of the area would likely lead to tougher weed issues as the sprawl of disturbance continues.

Signature of specialist: /s/ Sparky Taber 2/25/03

MIGRATORY BIRD TREATY ACT ISSUES: The Environmental Focus Alternative would be the preferred alternative for reducing the possibility of “take” of native birds. This would be due to the measure of closing “OHV open areas.” Vehicles that stay on trails have virtually no chance of destroying nests or individual birds. The other three alternatives allow OHV open areas and these carry some chance of destroying nests (mainly of horned larks). This risk is not enough to register as a violation of this act, especially under the Multiple-Use Alternative, which attempts to limit the expansion of OHV activity. The Friends of the North Fruita Desert Alternative would also likely include this management feature.

Signature of specialist: /s/ Ron Lambeth July 30, 2003

NATIVE AMERICAN RELIGIOUS CONCERNS: No NRHP-eligible properties occur within the proposed project area. In addition, there is no other known evidence that suggests that the project area holds special significance for Native Americans, and accordingly, no Native American Indian consultation was conducted for the proposed planning unit. If significant cultural resources are encountered during the conduct of NHPA Section 106 inventories, the BLM would initiate appropriate consultation measures at that time.

Signature of specialist: /s/ Mike Berry 30 June 2003

PRIME AND UNIQUE FARMLANDS: There are no Prime and Unique Farmlands affected by this proposal.

Signature of specialist: /s/ David P. Stevens 6-25-02

THREATENED AND ENDANGERED SPECIES: Attached is a map showing the locations of known rare animals/plants/plant communities. These areas are to be avoided by all trails and recreation facilities. Detailed information of the specific sites is found in the Arc View system used by BLM. None of the alternatives would affect the one species listed for protection under the Endangered Species Act, the bald eagle. The level of human activity in the area may have already eliminated nesting by the BLM sensitive species, Ferruginous Hawk, from the area. Existing routes pass within a quarter-mile of all three of the historic nest sites. However, the bike trail passing two nest sites would be rerouted (T8S, R101 & 102W, Section line of 31 & 36). The decline of prairie dogs has likely also had an effect, diminishing the imperative for them to nest here. Additionally this decline in prairie dogs has impacted the numbers of the Burrowing Owl, a threatened species under state law. Thus the capacity for any alternative to impact these species is reduced and may be eliminated. If the prairie dog numbers rebound, the importance of the measures to decrease human disturbance on these two raptors would increase in importance.

Signature of specialist: /s/ Ron Lambeth 30 July 2003
/s/ David Smith 19 May 2003

WASTES, HAZARDOUS OR SOLID: Hazardous and solid wastes are an issue in the planning area as a result of the high level of public use and the resulting frequency of illegal dumping. The area receives most of the illegal dumping in the Resource Area, due to the high use and proximity to Grand Junction and Fruita. This recreation management plan would not likely influence the frequency of dumping of trash and hazardous waste. It may not impact the incidence of litter since the area would undoubtedly continue to receive increasing public use. Illegal dumping is addressed as it is reported and encountered in the field, and increasing recreational use of the area may aid in reporting incidences of dumping of hazardous wastes.

The Multiple-Use Alternative would not designate additional special shooting areas. This would serve to disperse the target shooting and not concentrate lead contamination from spent bullets. The Environmental Focus Alternative would designate and manage three shooting areas. If this alternative is selected, the designated shooting areas should be chosen, designed, and managed in such a manner as to minimize and remediate potential lead contamination.

Signature of specialist: Alan Kraus 10 February 2003

WATER QUALITY, SURFACE AND/OR GROUND: The North Fruita Desert Management Planning Area encompasses portions of the Salt Creek, Big Salt Wash, and Little Salt Wash watersheds. Tributaries to Salt Creek, in the assessment area, include Mack Wash and Coyote Wash. Big Salt Wash tributaries include Coal Canyon, Dry Gulch, Lippan Wash, Layton Wash, and East Branch. Tributaries to Little Salt Creek are unnamed. The reaches of these tributaries within the planning area are ephemeral, so flow is in response to convective summer storms and snowmelt. Limited water quality data is available for these systems because they are generally

dry. Data collected by the BLM in Big Salt Wash on the north end of the planning area indicate elevated total dissolved solids (TDS), with the major ions including sodium, magnesium, and sulfates. The mean TDS was nearly 1100 milligrams per liter (mg/l). As the streams flow to the south across the Mancos shale the TDS levels increase, as evidenced by the mean TDS on East Salt Creek above the canal at nearly 3400 mg/l. No suspended sediment data have been collected but visual observations indicate extremely high levels are common during runoff events. Levels over 300,000 mg/l have been measured on West Salt Creek. Similar concentrations probably occur in the washes/creeks within this area. Channel cross-sections on Big Salt indicate significant channel erosion occurs during some runoff events.

The Colorado River Basin Salinity Control Act (Public Law 93-320) was enacted in June 1974. Title I of the act addresses the United States' commitment to the Water Treaty of 1944 with Mexico. The Colorado River Basin Salinity Control Act was amended in 1984 by Public Law 98-569. Public Law 98-569 included direction to the BLM to develop a comprehensive program for minimizing salt contributions from lands under their management. Studies conducted on Mancos shale in the Upper Colorado River Basin have demonstrated a positive relationship between sediment yield and salt production (Schumm, et al., 1986). Sediment yield increases as a result of either upland erosion or streambank and gully erosion. Upland erosion is attributed to rill and inter-rill flow. Salt and sediment yield are dependent upon storm period, landform type, and the soluble mineral content of the geologic formation. Badlands are the most erosionally unstable, with sediment yields as high as 15 tons per acre (U.S. Department of Agriculture, 1976). Rilling accounts for approximately 80 percent of the sediment yield (U.S. Department of Interior). Because salt production is closely related to sediment yield and the badland soils have not been leached of their soluble minerals, they produced the greatest amount of salt of the landform types. The SCS in 1977 estimated the Grand Valley annually contributed 2.9 million tons of sediment, and 600,000 to 700,000 tons of salt of which 80,000 tons results from erosion.

The most important variables influenced by management actions are vegetative cover and compaction. The BLM's preferred method of achieving salinity control are actions that increase ground cover, stabilizing stream banks, controlling accelerated gully erosion, and minimizing surface disturbing activities. Keeping with the spirit of the law, the RMP set sediment and salinity reduction objectives for Area F: Emphasis on Water, the area encompassed by this plan. They include, in part, taking measures to reduce sediment yield from approximately 177,000 acres and salinity yield from approximately 133,000 acres in the Grand Valley. Additionally, treating 8.3 miles of severely eroding stream channel in Big Salt Wash was identified. The development of a network of roads, both single and double track, needs to consider the objectives of the RMP and compliance with the Colorado River Basin Salinity Control Act.

Siting of routes is probably the single most significant factor in reducing sediment and salinity production. Every effort should be taken to maximize vegetative cover and minimize compaction within a watershed. If the vegetative cover is removed and soils compacted, rills often form accelerating erosion and sediment production. While open areas have significantly increased saline sediment production in that localized area, they can be beneficial if they remove impact from a large percentage of a watershed. Sediment and salinity production from these open areas can often be mitigated by construction of sediment detention structures down gradient of the open area. Water structures constructed for livestock and wildlife watering within the

planning area would experience a shortened functional life. They would need to have sediment removed more frequently due to the accelerated sediment produced from upstream trail use. Alternatives favoring fewer routes, those constructed more on the contour, concentrating open OHV use in a small percentage of a watershed, those constructed with areas with more rock content are preferred over those without these characteristics. Consideration should be given to construction of sediment and salinity mitigation structures and monitoring for excessive resource damage. Likewise, a percentage of range watering maintenance costs should be paid by fees potentially collected from users in this area.

Signature of specialist: /s/ Jim Scheidt 2/6/03

WILDERNESS, AREAS OF CRITICAL ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERN, WILD AND SCENIC RIVERS: The planning area is not within the boundaries of a designated Wilderness area or a Wilderness Study Area (WSA), Area of Critical Environmental Concern, or Wild and Scenic River. The northeastern corner of the area is adjacent to the Hunter Canyon Colorado Wilderness Proposal (CWP) area, a citizen's wilderness recommendation area that has been identified as having wilderness characteristics.

Signature of specialist: Philip A. Gezon 6/11/2003

NON-CRITICAL ELEMENTS

ACCESS AND TRANSPORTATION: Initiating travel planning in the planning area, along with the public information efforts, would implement the RMP. User maps and on-the-ground signing would greatly reduce off-trail travel and associated resource impacts. Phasing out unnecessary routes through time would give the public time to change use patterns and would decrease natural resource impacts stemming from those trails. The proposed new trails would redirect visitors away from the Highline Canal, private property, and riparian zones. The resulting designated loop trail system would provide a high quality trail experience for motorized and non-motorized visitors.

Private property would be protected on-the-ground by signing and maps that clearly identify land status.

By identifying the OHV open area, the intent of the travel management plan would become clearer to the public. Creation of the bicycle emphasis area would greatly reduce the user conflicts associated with shared trails. The bicycle community has expressed much opposition to sharing trails.

Signature of specialist: /s/Jim Cooper 2/12/03

FOREST MANAGEMENT: NA

Signature of specialist: /s/ David P. Stevens 6-25-02

GEOLOGY AND MINERALS:

Oil and Gas

The existing 18 Road trailhead and the proposed campground are not currently leased for oil and gas, but interest in the area has been expressed in the past. The Open OHV area at the southern edge of the North Fruita Desert Plan Area is part of the Fruita Gas Storage Agreement (No. 047628). This agreement, dating to 1920, gives the owner, Public Service Corporation, the right to use the underlying Dakota Formation for natural gas storage. The area could be leased for gas production from formations other than the Dakota. No facilities have been constructed on the agreement area to date, but the company has retained the agreement through the years to maintain operational flexibility to meet future natural gas storage needs for the Grand Valley.

Impact to oil and gas would be related to the NSO proposed for the existing trailhead, and the proposed campground and OHV area. The total acres in NSO would be 80 acres for the trailhead and 200 acres for the campground. Impacts from the trailhead and campground would be minimal. Any oil or gas present in those parcels could be accessed most likely by an adjacent drilling site or if necessary by directional drilling. In the event that either of these two methods could not achieve complete removal, the amount of oil or gas lost would be minimal. There is potential if the area becomes very popular with recreationists that oil and gas activity could suffer additional impacts if the two uses conflict with each other.

Coal

There is significant potential for coal development encompassing the outcrop area along the face of the Bookcliffs and Coal Gulch. Access to the coal could include using 16 and 18 Roads, or possibly a new route. In 1981, the BLM issued 3 coal leases for about 15,000 acres to Dorchester Coal Company. The lessee submitted a mine permit application that included extensive surface facilities on BLM-managed land near the end of 18 Road just below the Fruita Mines portal. The permit was never approved and the leases expired. The Fruita Mines portal is closed, but the underground entries were extended across private lands to the edge of the unleased federal coal. The Coal Gulch area also was previously explored and leased for coal as part of the Dorchester leases. There has been recent interest from coal companies in looking at the drill hole data from the Dorchester leases based on the potential coal resource. Exploration data indicates extensive reserves of low-sulfur coal located in a 25-foot thick seam. If a new underground mine was proposed that utilized the 18 Road access, this would require upgrading the road for truck haulage. The operating plan for the now-defunct Dorchester proposal shows a railway spur, a conveyor line, and extensive surface facilities astride 18 Road and the Layton Wash drainage.

Siting surface facilities below the portal access near the end of 18 Road would adversely affect a campground and some of the mountain bike trails in this area. Based on this, the proposed action includes a special stipulation that would be applied to any coal lease, off-lease right-of-way, or other authorization that proposes coal surface facilities that might impact the campground and trailhead (see proposed action). Impacts to coal would be related to the special stipulation, which includes an NSO clause for the existing trailhead (80 acres), and the proposed campground (200 acres). If coal surface facilities were to impact the campground and trailhead, the special stipulation would require the coal lessee to fund the relocation of the campground and

trailhead, and/or demonstrate that operations can be conducted without causing unacceptable impacts on the concern identified. Alternatively, the coal lessee may propose to loop the coal facilities around the campground and trailhead. Relocation and/or avoidance-related costs would result in higher costs to the coal company but are not expected to preclude lease operations or affect the overall economics of the mining operation.

Signature of specialist: /s/ Bruce Fowler 9-22-03
/s/ Dave Trappett September 23, 2003

HYDROLOGY AND WATER RIGHTS: The hydrologic characteristics of the planning area are described in the water quality section above. A reduction in the vegetative and litter cover, coupled with soil compaction within the watershed (including the washes where trails are located) would affect the runoff characteristics in the impact area. The infiltration rate would be reduced resulting in increased overland flow. The time of concentration would also be shortened. The result would be an increase in flow within the washes and gullies and potentially increased stream scour. This channel erosion would increase sediment and salinity levels in receiving streams. Water rights are not an issue with this plan, although water storage structures would need maintenance on a more frequent basis given accelerated sediment production from the area.

Signature of specialist: /s/ Jim Scheidt 2/6/03

LAND STATUS/REALTY AUTHORIZATIONS: The federal government owns the surface and mineral estates of the subject lands. There are several private inholdings within the project area. The Master Title Plats indicate a number of realty authorizations within the project area including numerous rights-of-way for natural gas pipelines, utility lines, access roads, and detention dams, as well as coal classifications, BOR project withdrawals, and public water reserves. Responsible use of the area through education opportunities and the planned actions to identify and protect facilities in the area would ensure that none of the alternatives would conflict with existing realty authorizations. Signing all trails leading to private land, as "End of Public Route," would reduce conflicts between federal uses and private property.

Signature of specialist: /s/ Robin Lacy 7-29-03

LAW ENFORCEMENT/RESOURCE PROTECTION: As addressed in the description, the area is receiving a significant increase in users. This increase correlates to user conflicts, impacts on resources, and damage to the infrastructure. Better signing and the availability of visitor maps would reduce the need for search and rescue incidents. Clear delineation of routes with signs would help reduce the off-trail excursions of visitors, thereby reducing the need for law enforcement presence.

The creation of a bicycle emphasis area would help reduce the impression of user conflict. The eventual establishment of shooting locations would reduce conflicts and may increase safety.

Increased levels of management in an area where little management presence has been evident would be met with some resistance from the local public during the first 3 to 5 years following

the implementation of a new management scenario. This period often requires additional field presence to explain the management to the public. Park Rangers and other non-law enforcement personnel can assist law enforcement in this effort. Initially signs and facilities may experience vandalism, however, in the long run more management would reduce trespass, dumping, and other illegal activities.

Impacts to law enforcement would probably be greatest from the Environmental Focus Alternative because it proposes to close the most routes, has no provision for visitor information, and would require the most agency presence to work.

Signature of specialist: R. E. GODWIN 02/11/03

PALEONTOLOGY: The proposal would not impact paleontological resources.

Signature of specialist: /s/ Bruce Fowler 2-12-03

RANGE MANAGEMENT:

Common to all Alternatives: Permittees would have to adapt to the increased use of the area, however there are steps that can be taken to ensure both permittees and recreationists have a positive experience. All alternatives should address loose dogs not in control of their owners. These dogs in the past have been seen chasing calves, which makes it difficult for the permittees to get their cows to stay in the area being designated for use. It is suggested that all dogs be on leashes, January 1 through May 15 (time of calving), that are left unattended in the campground or parking lots. Dogs on trails should be within the voice control of their owners. Education of recreationists to decrease user-group conflicts should be prominently displayed in handout literature and on kiosks. All competitive and organized events should give notice to the permittees so they can make arrangements to move cattle if needed for the safety of event participants and livestock. All potential soil and vegetation impacts due to increased recreation (any rill erosion starting from trails, trail widening, vegetation composition around trails, etc.) should be tracked through vegetative studies, land health assessment, and trail maintenance evaluation.

Multiple-Use Alternative: Open areas can prove to be beneficial when fenced, which would help to take OHV pressure off other vegetative areas along with helping to reduce sediment loading from other areas, and by reducing permanent removal of vegetation and soil compaction. These areas would also make it safer for persons wanting the off-road experience, who are concentrating on the jumps and more difficult terrain, by fencing livestock of all ages out of these areas.

All additional trails should be coordinated with the range staff and, when crossing the electric fence separating two pastures, a recreation cattle guard should be placed to help ensure the pasture fence stays up. Due to the increases in recreation use, a portion of any future fee collection should be made available for range improvements impacted by these activities, i.e., ponds around or in a drainage containing a higher concentration of trails, fencing, and possible areas of vegetative reclamation.

Environmental Alternative: Protection of the riparian values of East Salt Creek and the upper reach of Big Salt Creek within the planning area, as well as closure of all OHV Open areas proposed in the Environmental Focus Alternative, would benefit range condition by removing a major source of soil compaction and vegetation removal. However, no alternative would have a significant affect or impact one way or the other on the grazing management of the area.

Signature of specialist: Lynae Rogers 2-19-03

RECREATION:

Affected Environment

The area affected by the proposed action lies entirely within the North Fruita Desert Intensive Recreation Management Area. A wide variety of recreational activities takes place in this area in multiple settings. The primary activities taking place include OHV use, hiking, mountain biking, horseback riding, camping, hunting, and target shooting. Traffic counter derived data would indicate upwards of 50,000 recreationists per year visit the area.

Multiple-Use Alternative

The management direction and management actions being proposed as part of the proposed alternative would have varying degrees of impact to the recreational opportunities present in the area. Phasing-in of a closure on parallel and stem trails should result in a decrease in the number of less attractive motorized recreational routes through time, while allowing users to adjust their trail riding habits to eventual closure. The long-term impact on recreational motorized users would be fewer miles of routes; however, those that remain would be well signed and would likely see periodic maintenance to allow for unrestricted use. The strategy of signing, handout maps and portal kiosk displays would tend to decrease the number of motorized users getting lost and going cross-country. With fewer roads and trails and greater trail use compliance, less soil compaction and vegetative damage would occur.

The implementation of the proposed alternative would in general reduce the attractiveness of the area to those recreationists wanting a custodial-only government presence and management approach, and therefore would likely displace some irresponsible users to other less-managed areas. It would, in turn, likely increase the use of the area by more responsible users. Those wishing to camp overnight in a self-directed fashion and to have traditional camp fires wherever they choose to camp at the end of 18 Road, would be negatively impacted by the proposed managed campground facility. The majority of people, however, would likely use the campground and would respect the Agency's commitment to decreasing resource damage created by unrestricted camping. Prohibiting solid fuel campfires would decrease the vegetative stripping presently ongoing in the area and would decrease the threat of wildfire ignition from unattended campfires.

Creating bicycle and hiker/equestrian emphasis areas would tend to decrease conflict between user groups by zoning. If the overall plan is viewed by the recreational public as fair, that would increase the probability that the emphasis zones would be honored.

Creating new multiple-use, single-track trails would have the general affect of increasing the quality of motorcycle-based recreation in the area. Key linkages and loops would be created for this use. One likely outcome of this approach would be a decreased potential for motorcyclists to impinge on the bicycle and hiker/equestrian emphasis areas because their recreational needs would be better met.

The shared use (motorcycle/bicycle) trails at the east and west edges of the bicycle area would give motorcycles access to the rolling, more vegetated terrain at the toe of the Bookcliffs and give them a northern connection between 18 and 21 Roads. Bicyclists would feel that they had lost portions of two trails that they had considered their own and would perceive an increasing threat from motorcycle traffic on the rest of their trails.

Constructing a new primitive campground at the end of 18 Road would decrease the spread of pioneering camping sites and would reduce vegetation, soils, and human health and safety impacts. Those wanting a less-managed approach would be displaced to camping alternatives elsewhere, potentially to areas even less appropriate for their use. The majority of campers would appreciate the site management and maintenance and would respect the facilities provided, doing their best to help with upkeep.

By committing to an organized and competitive event screening process, the BLM would be placing both present and future applicants on notice that a higher degree of scrutiny would be applied to permit requests. Denying requests that adversely impact present uses and trails would tend to maintain the ambiance and trail configurations that recreationists enjoy at present.

All publics would view not designating shooting areas as a mistake. Shooters would feel that their activity was being excluded from the positive management actions that have been applied to other user groups. Other recreational groups would feel threatened by unregulated shooting. The situation would have potential for a critical public safety incident, but it also has potential for a responsible user group to be formed to act as a partner for the BLM to help manage identified designated shooting sites.

Bureau of Reclamation water control structures would be less threatened by recreational vandalism with the use of designated routes to funnel most traffic away from the Highline canal.

Fencing the OHV Open area and the roads to the north and northeast would have the affect of limiting the growth of unrestricted off highway activity in that area. By providing a vault toilet facility, parking area, and educational/instructional/regulatory signing, the staging needs of motorized users would be met to the same degree as the bicyclists presently enjoy. Many users would appreciate and respect these facilities. Others would look upon them as symbols of governmental presence and management and would register their displeasure through vandalism.

With the installation of informational/educational/regulatory kiosks, the public would better understand the rules of use and would be better oriented as they enter the area. Many users would appreciate and respect this approach to visitor management. Those wanting a less-managed area would either be displaced elsewhere, potentially to areas less suitable to their use, or would register their displeasure through vandalism.

Installing a lockable gate at the county gravel site would aid in ongoing restoration of the area. Some shooters accustomed to using the site would be displaced.

No Action Alternative

Selection of the No Action Alternative would continue the present custodial management of the North Fruita Desert Area. Off-highway vehicles would be limited to existing roads and trails, but with no signing or orientation maps available to tell recreationists where they are and what trails are existing, the continuing spread of additional routes would be a forgone conclusion. Camping would continue to occur in a haphazard sprawl. Impacts to natural resource and human health and safety would continue and would likely increase with an increasing camping population in the future. The practice of constructing user-created trails without involving the Agency in environmental evaluation of the locations and consequences would continue. Conflicts between user groups would remain, with the potential for incursions into other groups' chosen trails and sites.

Environmental Focus Alternative

Selection of the Environmental Focus Alternative would provide for protection of riparian areas, lessened density of trail systems, closure of the OHV Open area, designation of shooting areas, and creation of a hiker/equestrian emphasis zone. This alternative would focus on binary trail designations, whereby a trail is either open or closed, with no transition or phasing towards abandonment of lesser-used, stem, or parallel trails. Although most trail users would abide with such an approach, some mechanized or motorized trail users would feel that trail access had been limited in a draconian fashion and they would likely ignore some closures. Shooters, hikers and horseback riders would benefit from this alternative while trail-use groups would either not be affected or adversely affected, depending on their view of the fairness of the closures.

Friends of the North Fruita Desert Alternative

This alternative focuses on shared motorcyclist/bicyclist objectives in preserving single-track trail, creating new parallel routes to avoid conflict and to maintain unrestricted access onto private lands. Use areas would likely be respected through this alternative, as the linkage needs of the motorcycling community would be provided for. Bicyclists would be confident that their trail areas would remain largely un-impacted by motor vehicles. Responsibility to negotiate land acquisitions, easements, trades, or purchases to safeguard access onto private land routes would fall on the BLM. With higher priority lands actions ongoing, it is unlikely that these transactions would be consummated in a time frame satisfactory to the recreational public. The BLM would be in the position of supporting trespass onto private lands until route decisions are made, a position that is contrary to the Agency's authority.

Signature of specialist: /s/ Philip A. Gezon 2/5/2003

SOILS:

Affected Environment

Local geology has played a dominant role in the types of soils that have been developed in this area, and the topography on which they occur. Marine shales and sandstones of the Mancos

Shale Formation are the primary parent materials; sediments and colluvium from the Mesa Verde Formation, which forms the upper escarpments of the Bookcliffs, have also influenced soil development and characteristics. Soils developing in Mancos Shale materials are generally high in salts and sodium and have textures high in silt and clay. Often a thin, fine sandy loam surface horizon is present. The soils have slow permeability rates; concentrated runoff from storm events or snowmelt usually causes the most erosion and sediment production, primarily from the existing gully systems. Where the more sandy and stony alluvium or colluvium from the Mesa Verde Formation is present as pediment or ridge surficial material, soils do not have the high salt/alkali levels associated with the Mancos Formation, soil textures are sandier, and permeability is much greater. These soils are subject to more rapid erosion from recreational causes. Vegetation cover, however, is generally greater than that on the Mancos-derived soils, and erosion from natural sources is generally lower.

Watershed studies document a three- to eight-fold greater rate of erosion and sediment production from the moderately to steeply sloping, shallow Mancos shale-derived soils, than from the less sloping soils, soils derived from sandier materials, or those with better vegetative cover. The Badlands, Persayo, and Chipeta soils map units yield the highest rates of soil loss (7.5 to 15.0 tons of sediment per acre) while the Avalon, Youngston, and Uffens soils on average undergo 1.8 to 3.0 tons of sediment loss per acre. A great number of check dams, gully plugs, range pitting, and other sediment control/runoff retention measures have been applied to the North Fruita Desert Area and the area adjacent to the east. This has been in response to RMP goals and basin-wide legislation addressing the need to reduce salinity in the Colorado River. Reduction of sediment (and the salts it contains) is an on-going concern, and BLM management of the Mancos shale areas would continue to receive scrutiny, particularly in view of the effects of salinity on water quality regarding threatened and endangered fish species, agricultural use, and drinking water. Therefore, any management plan must take into account its affect on these issues.

Environmental Consequences and Mitigation

Recreational use by ATVs, other off-highway vehicles, motorcycles, mountain bikes, and horseback riders have an obvious impact on the soil resource. Where concentrated use takes place, loss of vegetation cover, loss of soil tilth, and accelerated erosion are the result. There are certain factors that mitigate the degree of these impacts but not to the extent that they can be considered minimal. The arid climate limits the times in which soils are wet, and the scattered nature and usually short duration of rainfall events reduce the impact of recreational use on the soil surface during the time they are wet. Because of the high content of sodium salts and lime, and the relatively high clay content, surface materials often “seal” and are somewhat more resistant to detachment or displacement. Locating and designing trails and roads along the contour and in a manner that does not concentrate runoff, or in areas less prone to receiving concentrated runoff, should be a high-priority goal. Exposures of sparsely vegetated Mancos shale parent material (Badlands) are scattered throughout the area, and poor trail placement in such areas often results in accelerated erosion and sediment production. These mitigation practices apply to all Alternatives considered within this proposal.

Soils on the ridges and dissected alluvial fans nearer the Bookcliffs generally contain stone and gravel. Many of the soils have an extremely stony surface. These materials serve to reduce soil

loss from the concentrated use impact on roads and trails. Locating roads and trails along the contour, and erosion control practices, such as water bars, greatly help to reduce potential erosion and the amount of sediment produced.

Biological crusts are present throughout the area, most often as fragmented or discontinuous patches. They protect the surface soils from particle detachment by raindrops and from wind erosion; however, they can also reduce the spread or presence of vegetative cover. These crusts are fragile and are easily destroyed by recreational uses. They benefit from management that limits these uses to existing or planned roads and trails.

Signature of specialist: Tom Bargsten 2/1/2003

VISUAL RESOURCES:

Affected Environment

The North Fruita plan area includes a variety of visual resources ranging from the barren desert landscape north of the Highline canal, to the pinyon-juniper forest at the toe of the slope to the sandstone cliffs overlooking the area. The desert portion is undifferentiated according to Visual Resource Management (VRM) classification. The cliffs and toe slopes are classified as VRM Class III, a designation that allows for the partial retention of the existing landscape character. Changes in the landscape are allowed but should not attract the attention of the casual observer.

Environmental Consequences and Mitigation

The actions proposed in any of the alternatives can generally be designed and sited to meet the objectives of these VRM classes.

Signature of specialist: Philip A. Gezon 2/5/2003

WILDLIFE, AQUATIC: Building and maintaining salinity/sediment retention structures down slope of the trails would help mitigate the trail system impacts of increased salinity/sediment on the Colorado River fishes, including the four federally listed species. See mitigation measures regarding the structure planning to be done as the trail systems are developed.

Signature of specialist: /s/ David Smith 19 May 2003

WILDLIFE, TERRESTRIAL: While the desert appears impoverished of wildlife to the casual visitor, a trip across the area after snow has lain on the ground for two days (rare situation) can reveal several track lines of cottontail rabbits, prairie dogs, kangaroo rats, coyotes, a kit fox, a badger, a weasel, pronghorn antelope, and horned larks. Somewhere along the row of transmission line towers there would be perched golden eagles, a ferruginous hawk, a prairie falcon and a merlin. The warm season population of wildlife would be greater with the return of migrants and hibernators.

Developments to assist human recreation on natural lands present a mixed bag of effects to wildlife. Inducing people to come to natural lands likely results in some of them seeing wildlife and developing an appreciation for it. This promotes human behavior that benefits wildlife.

However, increasing human traffic and dispersing it results in there being fewer places for wildlife to carry out life processes. Generally, the larger the animal, the more space it requires for its life processes. Black bear, elk, mule deer, and pronghorn antelope are the largest animals regularly using the planning area. The first three cling to the area along the Bookcliffs with occasional trips south along East and Big Salt Washes. All alternatives would limit route developments within those washes, with the possible one new crossing Big Salt Wash at the north edge of the plan area.

The No Action Alternative is the least attractive one for wildlife, because it lacks most of the impact eliminating measures present in the other alternatives. It would not have the signage to cultivate a human population sensitive to wildlife possibilities and needs.

The Multiple-Use and Friends of the NFD Alternatives have positive features for wildlife. Attempting to shift recreational pressure northward away from Highline Canal may help to preserve a west-east travel corridor for pronghorns as the private lands along 16 Road are developed for residences. One tactic for doing this is by designing an OHV area along Highline Canal. Instead of adding to the traffic problem, it should draw trail riding traffic to a more confined space. This, coupled with roadside fencing sending 18 Road traffic farther north, should improve the pronghorn travel corridor (the fence design would be passable to pronghorns). If the designated roads and trails policy works, vegetation production should not become the limiting factor for any species of wildlife present. Wildlife would be able to adjust to the increased human presence if pioneering, cross-country travel becomes rare. The sudden popularity of the juniper terraces along the Bookcliffs at 18 Road with mountain bikers and campers has impacted big game use there in the spring. The more critical big game range farther northwest remains relatively undeveloped for recreation under the Multiple-Use and Friends of the NFD Alternatives. Prohibiting solid fuel campfires should allow the juniper savannah to persist, maintaining the habitat of woodland wildlife (grasshopper mouse, juniper titmouse, gray vireo, mountain bluebird, Scott's oriole are some high interest species). Designating areas to emphasize different activities should provide sanctuary for wildlife able to adjust to some types of activity better than do others. Where this results in multiplied routes and wider distribution of use, it is more harmful than helpful to wildlife. Sub-Alternative B of the Multiple-Use Alternative has this attribute, as does Sub-Alternative C to a greater degree. Thus Sub-Alternative A is preferred for wildlife over the other two options. Closing roads that lead to private land trespass would, at least temporarily, provide more solitude for wildlife. The Friends of the NFD Alternative would delay solving this issue. Also it would create more miles of trail to separate mountain bikers from motorized vehicles. From a wildlife perspective it is less favored than the Multiple-Use Alternative.

The Environmental Focus Alternative contains elements that, if feasible and implemented, would benefit wildlife. 1) A policy to close trails at least temporarily if they threaten burrowing owls, 2) greater emphasis on non-motorized travel probably resulting in less traffic, and 3) closing OHV open areas would all allow more wildlife to remain in the area. The proposed area "closed to mechanized travel" offers the chance to keep and improve a sanctuary for chukar partridges and associated wildlife species. Closing all OHV open areas has the drawback of eliminating the chance to create a fenced designated area managed for cross-country travel.

The two eliminated alternatives had strong wildlife rationales for their elimination. Preserving the deer and elk critical winter range north of Coal Canyon and keeping trails out of uppermost Layton Wash are important gestures toward keeping big game in the area.

Signature of specialist: /s/ Ron Lambeth 30 July 2003

CUMULATIVE IMPACTS *(The effects of a proposed action on a given resource, ecosystem, and human community include the present and future effects added to the effects that have taken place in the past.)*

The North Fruita Desert has a long history of land management actions. From extensive long-term grazing to coal mining to oil and gas production and now to motorized and mechanized recreation, the desert shows on-the-ground affect from these activities. The overall affect of the selected alternative would be to formalize and make more permanent activities, which have been on going in the desert. The proposed campground would likely make the present dispersed camping pattern less transient, with facilities and armoring of use surfaces to allow for human use with lesser impact. Whereas the construction of more intermediate-level bicycle trails would increase use of the designated bicycle area, rehabilitation of other trails would lead to less soil erosion, and fewer safety hazards. Construction of the 4 miles of singletrack parallel to Coal Gulch Road along the crest of the Bookcliffs would open this area to both motorized and non-motorized traffic in an area that has not seen such use. It would, however, displace that use from the Coal Gulch Road and would have human safety and lesser soil erosion advantages. The selected alternative would have no effect on the likelihood that sub-division activity would probably occur in the near future on some privately owned parcels which predominate between Colorado Highway 139 and 18 Road. In comparison to future potential actions such as private land sub-development, renewal of coal mining or major oil and gas activity, the proposed actions would have little cumulative impact on the North Fruita Desert environment.

PERSONS/AGENCIES CONSULTED:

North Fruita Desert Citizen Ad-Hoc Committee - comprised of:

Amy Agapito, Mesa County Cycling Association
Doug Buniger, Colorado Plateau Mountain Bike Trail Assoc.
Kevin Foote, Grand Valley Mountain Bike Patrol
Charlie Sweet, Motorcycle Trail Riding Association
Steve Chapel, Western Slope ATV Association
John Potter, Bookcliff Rattlers Motorcycle Club
Ed Gunderson, Landowner/Rancher
Kim Albertson, Landowner/Rancher
Joe Bernal, Private landowner
Cricket Donoho, Horseback rider
Susan Claffey, Colorado Environmental Coalition
N.J. Fulmer, Sierra Club
Dusty Dunbar, City of Fruita
Chris Foreman, Highline Lake State Park

Jim Majors, hiker, mountain biker
Matt Powers, OHV, shooter
Ron Brock, shooter
Colorado Division of Wildlife

Northwest Resource Advisory Council Members of Ad-Hoc Committee

Troy Rarick (Mountain Biker)
Ken Currey (OHV, Oil & Gas)
Lee Dyer (Environmental/Science)

BLM Interdisciplinary Team

Philip Gezon- Team Leader/Writer
Jim Cooper- Transportation and Trails
Chris Pipkin - Field Recreation Concerns and Mapping
Andy Windsor - Field Recreation Concerns and Mapping
Dick Godwin - Law Enforcement
Ron Lambeth - Wildlife
Dave Smith - Fisheries, T & E Species
Lynae Rogers - Range
Tom Bargsten - Soils
Mike Berry - Archaeology
Wayne Bankert - Oil and Gas
Bruce Fowler - Geology, Minerals
Jim Scheidt - Hydrology
Harley Metz - Ecology
Alan Kraus - Hazardous Materials

Others

Colorado Off-Highway Vehicle Coalition

EA No.

FONSI

The environmental assessment, analyzing the environmental effects of the proposed action, has been reviewed. The approved mitigation measures result in a finding of no significant impact on the human environment. Therefore, an environmental impact statement is not necessary to further analyze the environmental effects of the proposed action.

DECISION RECORD

DECISION AND RATIONALE: It is my decision to implement the project as described.

MITIGATION MEASURES: Mitigation measures are focused on trail-related proposals as well as on measures identified by discipline in the EA

- A monitoring plan would be the basic tool for evaluating trail rider adherence to trail management provisions of the plan. This would consist of 1) Collection of traffic counter data, 2) Direct observation of visitor-use patterns and behavior by BLM staff, and 3) On-the-ground photo monitoring at approximately 20 selected points, with update photos taken twice a year. The photo monitoring points would focus on locations identified in the North Fruita Desert Plan for management actions. These would include the OHV Open area, the campground, riparian areas, the bicycle emphasis zone, trails entering privately owned land, trails nearby the Highland Canal, and the 21 Road area.

- All construction equipment shall be clean and free of weed seed prior to moving equipment onto public lands. Radiators, tracks, tires, air pre-cleaners, blades, rippers, buckets, and any flat surface on machines that accumulate debris shall be washed clean. (See weed attachment to the Environmental Assessment.)

- All dogs must be under the voice control of owners when on the trails and during calving time (between January 1 to May 15); dogs must also be leashed when unattended at the trailheads or campground.

- An integral part of any trail system would be a plan for building and maintaining salinity/sediment retention structures down slope of the trails which would help mitigate the trail system impacts of increased salinity/sediment on the Colorado River fishes, including the four federally listed species.

- For both motorized and non-motorized trails, recruit partners who would help manage trails. Functions such as trail maintenance, designing, installing and maintaining informational and

directional signs, assisting with unwanted trail closures and rehabilitation, trash removal, and periodic route patrols would be part of their job duties.

REMARKS:

COMPLIANCE PLAN:

SIGNATURE OF PREPARER:

SIGNATURE OF ENVIRONMENTAL COORDINATOR:

SIGNATURE OF AUTHORIZED OFFICIAL:_____

DATE SIGNED:_____

ATTACHMENTS:

Weed Stipulation for Equipment

Grand Junction RMP Implementation Worksheet
(Green Sheet)

Resource_____ Prepared By_____ Date

RMP Decision Id_____ ROD Page number

OBJECTIVE:

PLANNED MANAGEMENT ACTION:

PLANNED ACTIONS FOR FY 02

END OF YEAR SUMMARY FY 02

Weed Prevention Stipulation for

Surface Disturbance Projects

Grand Junction Field Office

Vehicles and heavy equipment are one of the primary agents for the spread of noxious weed seed to public lands. In efforts to mitigate the spread of weed seed to BLM lands the following actions are required for contractors prior to transport for BLM projects.

Support vehicles (pickups, fuel/service vehicles, transports, dump trucks, etc.)

- ▶ Pressure wash radiator to flush seeds.
- ▶ Pressure wash undercarriage and tires to remove accumulations of mud and soil that may contain seeds.

Heavy Equipment (dozers, road graders, excavators, backhoes, loaders, etc.)

- ▶ Pressure wash radiator(s) to flush seeds.
- ▶ Pressure wash tracks to remove accumulations of soil.
- ▶ Pressure wash all areas of soil/debris accumulations (i.e. steps)
- ▶ Pressure wash blades and buckets where soil/mud is accumulated.
- ▶ Empty pre-cleaners (air intake) before transport.

By following the above guidelines, the amount of seed spread and subsequent new infestations would decline. These are particularly important if a piece of equipment is coming from out-of-state.